



A special report on

# EDUCATION OUTCOMES

*A voice and a  
vision for  
Indiana's  
foster youth*

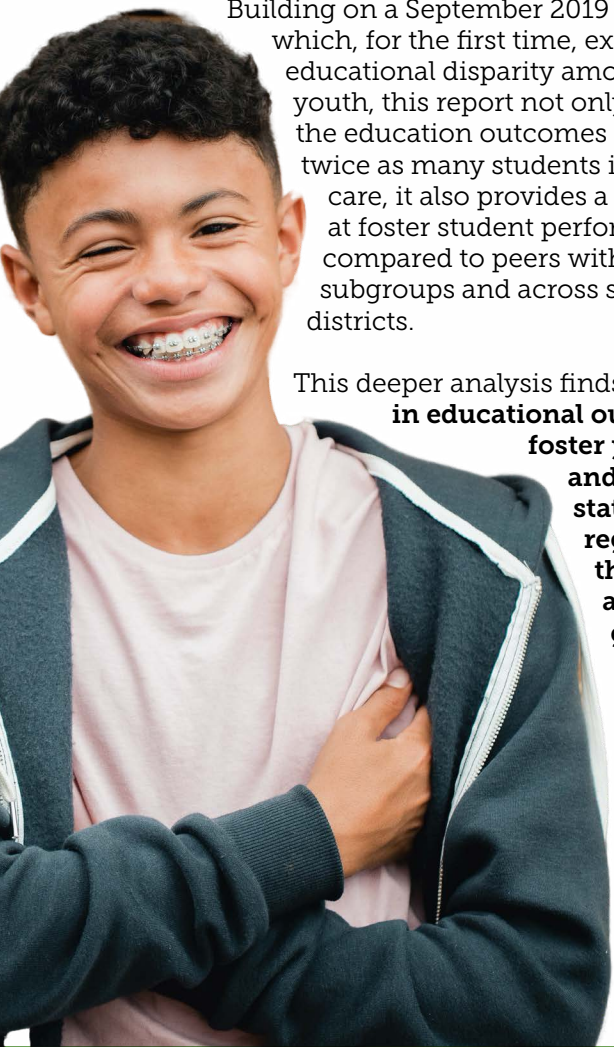




# Our foster youth are falling behind

But we can change these outcomes and improve lives

Indiana is home to nearly 31,000 children in foster care and has the fourth-highest rate of youth in foster care in the nation. The state's nearly 17,000 school-age foster youth are spread across schools of all sizes and in communities of all types, but **about 10 percent of the public school corporations educate almost half of Indiana's students in foster care.**



Building on a September 2019 report which, for the first time, examined the educational disparity among foster youth, this report not only represents the education outcomes of nearly twice as many students in foster care, it also provides a deeper look at foster student performance compared to peers within various subgroups and across school districts.

This deeper analysis finds that **gaps in educational outcomes for foster youth persist and are present statewide regardless of the student's age, race, gender, ethnicity, or location.**

This consistent and persistent gap in education equity, amplifies the need for significant additional support and stability for students in foster care at all grade levels, across all schools and in all Hoosier communities, to close achievement gaps and guarantee foster youth can succeed at the same levels as their peers.

Foster care in and of itself does not lead to negative education outcomes, but the underlying trauma leading to placement in foster care and potentially trauma experienced while in care, compounded with high rates of mobility and instability negatively impact the outcomes for some of Indiana's most vulnerable students.

**From the early test scores of the IREAD-3 to graduation rates across all Indiana counties, those who experience foster care are falling behind their non-foster care peers at alarming rates, but we can change this story and these outcomes. Through collaboration and focused programs and resources, Indiana can improve the education outcomes, and in turn, the life outcomes, for Hoosiers in foster care.**

Informed by feedback from students who have experienced foster care and staff who support students in foster care, the recommendations at the end of this report include suggestions for increasing educational stability and providing extra support to counterbalance the trauma that impacts learning.

**"...gaps in educational outcomes for foster youth persist and are present statewide regardless of the student's age, race, gender, ethnicity, or location"**

## Across the state, students in foster care were...

**2x** Twice as likely to be in special education classes. Nearly one-third (32 percent) of students if foster care were in special education classes compared 16 percent of all students.

**2.5x** More than two times likely to be suspended than their peers. Students in foster care were 2.5 times more likely be suspended than students not in foster care (23 percent compared to nine percent).

**3x** Three times more likely to be retained in grade compared to all students. Roughly three percent of students in foster care, compared with one percent of all students, were retained in grade (held back).

**4x** Expelled four times more often than their non-foster care peers. One-quarter of a percent of all students were expelled from schools across across the state compared to more than 1 percent of students in foster care.

# 50% of the foster students enrolled in public schools were in 40 school corporations across the state

(about 10 percent of total public school corporations)

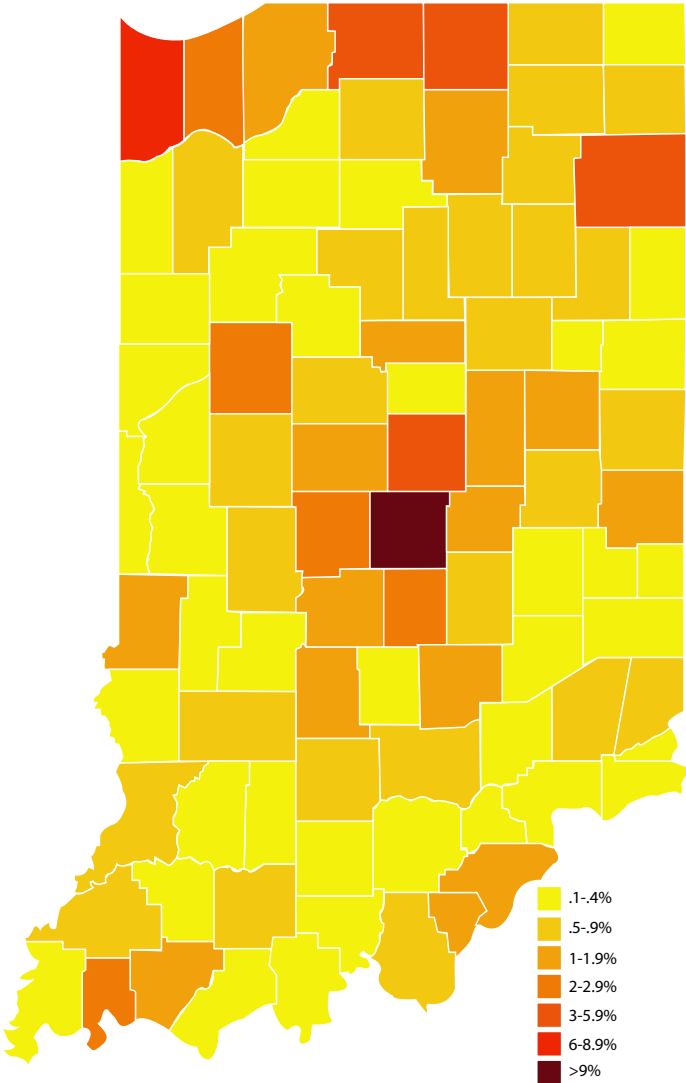
Indiana Counties with the Highest Number of Students in Foster Care

COUNTY	% OF TOTAL FOSTER STUDENTS	% OF ALL PUBLIC STUDENTS
Marion	18.0 (2,903)	14.3 (151,235)
Lake	6.4 (1,031)	7.6 (80,491)
Allen	5.9 (950)	5.2 (55,112)
Vanderburgh	3.9 (627)	2.2 (23,191)
St. Joseph	3.3 (537)	3.7 (38,902)
Delaware	2.8 (457)	1.4 (14,869)
Madison	2.5 (403)	1.8 (18,636)
Vigo	2.0 (324)	1.4 (14,722)
Elkhart	1.9 (305)	3.4 (36,244)
Johnson	1.8 (293)	2.6 (27,225)

Indiana Counties with Enrollment Ratios of Students in Foster Care of 2.5 Percent or More

COUNTY	# OF FOSTER STUDENTS	# OF TOTAL STUDENTS	RATIO OF FOSTER STUDENTS
Scott	164	3,856	4.3%
Wabash	206	5,326	3.9%
Crawford	56	1,511	3.7%
Orange	104	3,078	3.4%
Delaware	457	14,869	3.1%
Fayette	106	3,498	3.0%
Knox	155	5,323	2.9%
Posey	95	3,444	2.8%
Sullivan	87	3,154	2.8%
Owen	68	2,503	2.7%
Vanderburgh	627	23,191	2.7%
Jennings	113	4,187	2.7%
Perry	78	2,971	2.6%
Grant	237	9,192	2.6%
Brown	48	1,904	2.5%
Jay	79	3,167	2.5%

Foster students as a percent of student enrollment



18%

MARION COUNTY SCHOOL CORPORATIONS ENROLLED ALMOST ONE - FIFTH OF THE STATE'S STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE. Followed by Lake and Allen Counties (each enrolling 6 percent).

While urban counties tended to have larger numbers of students in foster care, rural counties typically had higher ratios (students in foster care / all students).

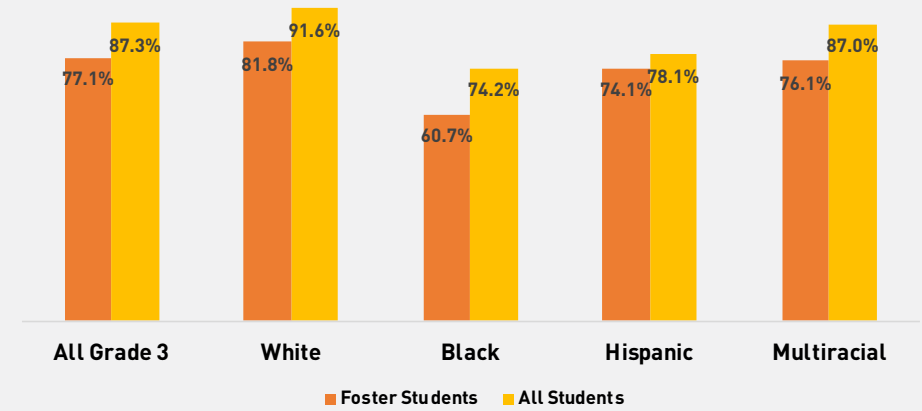
Half of Indiana's rural counties had students in foster care enrollment ratios of two percent or more, compared to only one-quarter of urban counties.

# Foster youth underperform their non-foster care peers on all state testing metrics

Students in foster care score behind their non-foster care peers on all state education assessments. The gap is the smallest, but still present, in 3rd grade on the IREAD-3 assessment (77 percent students in foster care passed IREAD-3 compared to 87 percent of all students), but the gap widens at each subsequent grade when examining ILEARN E/LA, ILEARN Math, ISTEP+ Grade 10 E/LA and ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math.

IREAD

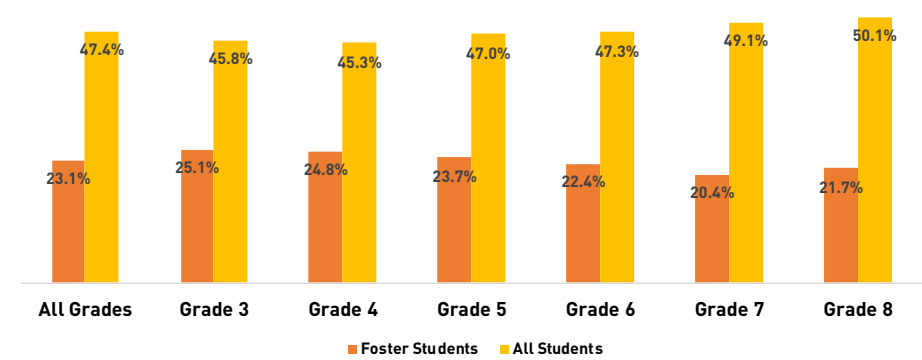
IREAD-3 Passing Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)



- » IREAD-3 passing rates were lower for all foster care student subgroups compared to all students within those subgroups except one (ELL students).
- » Only 61 percent of Black or African American students in foster care passed IREAD-3 compared to 74 percent of all Black or African American students and 92 percent of all White students.
- » Just half of foster students in special education passed the assessment, compared to 61 percent of all students in special education.
- » Less than three-quarters (73 percent) of male foster students passed the assessment, compared to 85 percent of all male students.

ILEARN

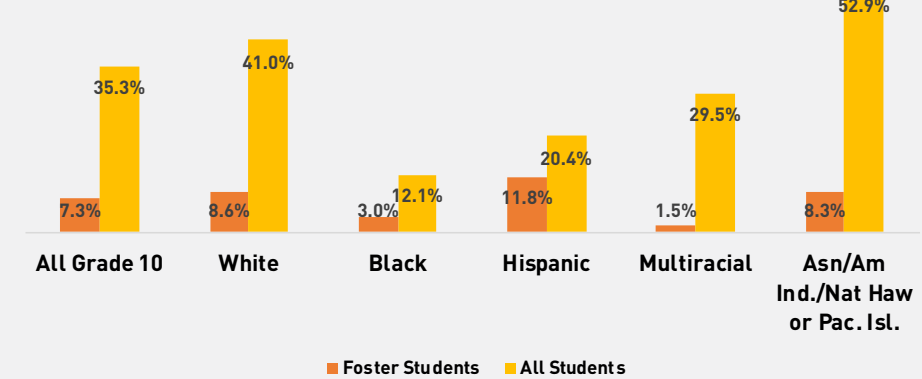
ILEARN Passing Rates by Grade



- » Foster youth are half as likely as all students to pass the ILEARN E/LA assessment (23 percent of foster students compared to 47 percent overall).
- » In general, the passing rate for ILEARN E/LA is consistent or increases by grade; however, for students in foster care the passing rate is consistent or decreases each year - further widening the achievement gap between students in foster care and their non-foster care peers.
- » While ILEARN Math passing rates for all student decrease by grade, passing rates for students in foster care decrease at a more rapid pace, further widening the achievement gap between students in foster care and all others.

ISTEP+ Grade 10

ISTEP+ Grade 10 Math Passing Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)



- » Performance gaps were present between foster students and their peers within every subcategory examined for both ISTEP+ Grade 10 E/LA and Math.
- » Students in foster care are half as likely to pass ISTEP+ Grade 10 E/LA compared to all students (29 percent compared to 62 percent). Only 20 percent of Black or African American foster students passed ISTEP+ Grade 10 E/LA, compared to 37 percent of all Black students and 68 percent of all White students.
- » Passing rates for ISTEP+ Math were five times lower for foster students (seven percent compared to 35 percent).

# Graduation & Degree Attainment

55%

55 PERCENT OF FOSTER YOUTH GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL  
Compared to 87% of all students.

Graduation rates for foster students lagged their peers in all subgroups.

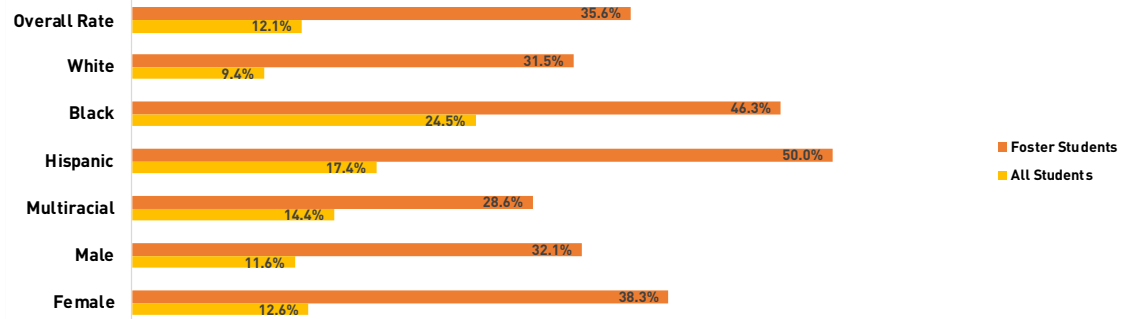


- » Only 54 percent of Black or African American and Hispanic/Latinx students in foster care graduated in four years, compared to 78 percent for all Black or African American students, 85 percent for all Hispanic/Latinx students, and 89 percent for all White students.
- » Fewer than half of the students in foster care and special education (49 percent) graduated in four years, compared to 71 percent of all students in special education.

36%

36% OF FOSTER GRADUATES RECEIVED WAIVERS  
3x higher than all students..

Percentage of Graduates Receiving Waivers

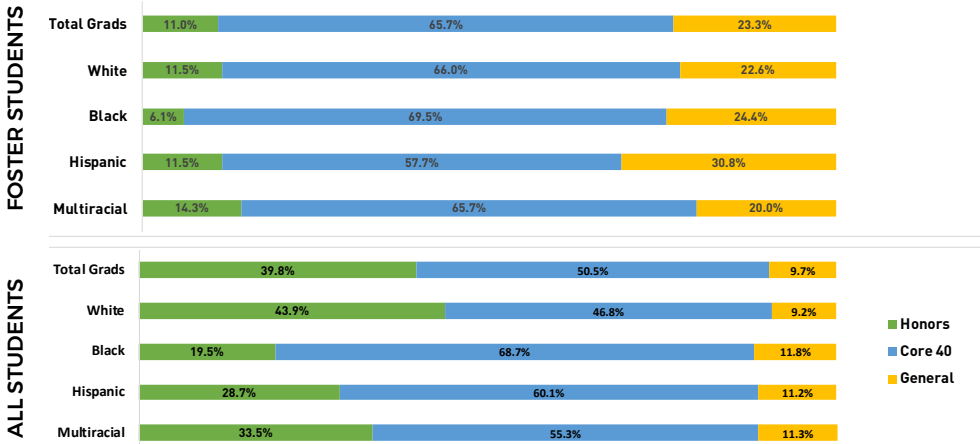


- » Half of all Hispanic/Latinx foster graduates and 46 percent of Black or African American students in foster care received a graduation waiver (compared to 17 percent of all Hispanic/Latinx students and 24.5 percent of all Black or African American students, and nine percent of all White students).
- » Female students in foster care received waivers at three times the rate of non-foster care female students (38% compared to 12 percent).

Foster students earn lesser degrees at astonishing rates.

- » Students in foster care were 3.5 times less likely than all students to earn an Honors diploma (11 percent compared to 40 percent) and far more likely to earn a General diploma (23 percent compared to 10 percent).
- » Nearly one-third of Hispanic/Latinx students earned General diplomas, compared to 11 percent of all students. Nearly one-quarter of Black or African American foster students (24 percent) earned General Diplomas, compared to 12 percent of all Black or African American students.

High school degrees earned by Indiana foster students and all students



11%

ONLY 11% OF STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE WERE LIKELY TO EARN AN HONORS DIPLOMA  
2.5x less than all students.

24%

OF BLACK STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE EARNED A GENERAL DIPLOMA. Which is 2x higher than all Black students.





# You can't separate education and success

## A diploma isn't enough

Education achievement at an early age is a key indicator of success after high school. Not only does a high school diploma represent a significant milestone for young adults, students who complete high school increase their likelihood for positive economic outcomes and self-sufficiency later in life. Receiving a diploma is not enough though. According to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, Indiana students who earned Honors diplomas were far more likely to enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school than those earning only a General diploma (91 percent of Honors recipients compared to just 15 percent of General diploma recipients).

Further, only 22 percent of students graduating with waivers enrolled in postsecondary immediately after high school, compared to 65 percent of those who did not graduate with waivers. Lack of postsecondary opportunities can contribute to lower lifetime wages – the Commission reports that even completing some college, but no degree, is related to more than \$150K in additional lifetime earnings compared to those holding only a high school diploma, and completing a Bachelor's degree can result in more than \$1M in additional lifetime earnings.

If we are going to close these gaps and improve the opportunity for educational success for students in foster care today—leading to economic and personal success tomorrow—we must understand what students in foster care need to successfully navigate their educational journey.

*"Acknowledge the data in the report. The lack of success of students in foster care, and the lack of success of many other students, indicate not that our kids are failing, but that our education system is failing."*  
—School Based Foster Care Point of Contact



# Students need *stability, support, and a voice.*

The following recommendations are based on best practices and feedback from students who were enrolled in high school while in foster care and from professionals who work with students in foster care across the state.

## Students Need Stability

Indiana children in foster care frequently experience disruptions and issues that impact educational achievement. Almost half of Hoosier children exiting foster care in 2018 had at least three placements. Each change in placement likely included a change in school leading to a disruption in education for the student. Ensuring stability in education requires a coordinated effort between the Indiana Department of Child Services, the Indiana Department of Education and local schools and school corporations. To achieve this, we must start by better defining "best interest of child" and all related policies regarding school placements. As one student shared, "deciding what is best for students is really case by case. We need to ask kids what they want to do." Beyond supporting each student's individual needs, we must:

- » Ensure that adequate resources are in place to guarantee an educational experience that aligns with the best interest of the child - this includes transportation and consistent adult support within their school.
- » Implement real-time information sharing processes so that school administrators know within 24 hours if a child in their school has entered foster care or if a new child enrolling in their school is in foster care.

*"Schools should implement programs that provide school-based personnel to champion a student's success in school, and ensure the student in foster care has every opportunity to achieve grade level expectations in every grade."*  
—School Based Foster Care Point of Contact

- » Require that for any student in foster care, a representative from the child's current school participate in Family Case Manager Team meetings.

## Students Need Support

Students in foster care need a network of support that includes peers and at least one key adult who knows their story, will believe in them, and can support them.

*"[The] final school made a difference in my success. My therapist and guidance counselor helped a lot. The Guidance Counselor was patient and supportive and was the one who recommended IU Groups and helped me see college as possible."*  
—College Student who experienced foster care

- » Clearly identify and advertise Foster Care Points of Contact for each school. Ensure that students, teachers, administrators, case workers, and foster parents know these individuals.
- » Provide per-pupil funding for school corporations based on the number of students in foster care they are educating. Funds could be used for additional professional development and direct support services and programs (transportation, counseling, tutoring) for students in foster care.

- » Implement regular, ongoing professional development for school administrators, social workers, counselors and teachers to ensure that they better understand the unique experiences and needs of children in foster care. Regularly convene Foster Care Points of Contact so they can build a stronger network across schools.

- » Set up after school/summer programs for therapy, tutoring, and accelerated credit recovery in conjunction with youth to rectify participation barriers.

*"We need to ask kids what they want to do. They know if they have friends. They know if they're being bullied."*  
—College Student who experienced foster care

## Students Need A Voice

- » Ask students what they want and what they need to succeed in school.
- » Create more intentional programs for high school students in foster care to explore education and career pathways that better align with their educational experiences and aspirations.
- » Build a network that allows students in foster care to know their peers.
- » Design a personalized education plan for each student in foster care that remains in the student's educational file if he/she transfers.

*"I didn't know anything about the other foster care students, unless they said something. I went to a grad party when we were graduating and met other foster care students there. (I) would have liked to have known these people before high school graduation."*  
—College Student who experienced foster care

## For further research

- » Commit to collecting and analyzing data on K-12 educational components that may also contribute to current foster youth outcomes, including attendance, dropout rates, and inter- and intra-district mobility.
- » Develop additional data sharing agreements with state agencies that have information on postsecondary enrollment and completion, as well as workforce outcomes, for foster students and their peers including the Management Performance Hub, Indiana Department of Workforce Development, and Indiana Commission for Education.
- » Invest in more robust studies that allow for analysis at the student level, to identify the extent to which various factors (including number of placements and time of entry into foster care) contribute to gaps in foster student outcomes, could lead to stronger and more conclusive recommendations.



Download the full version of this report and more at [fostersuccess.org/2020outcomes](https://fostersuccess.org/2020outcomes).



**We're on a mission** to ensure that youth transitioning out of foster care are educated, housed, financially stable, employed and connected to a support system by age 25.

**Foster Success envisions an Indiana where** all people who experienced foster care as a young adult in Indiana are self-sufficient by age 25.



*This report was published with support from  
Chamberlin Dunn*

\*The term "school corporation" is used generally to mean traditional public school corporations, charter schools, turnaround schools, university schools, and state-run schools.

\* Students in the clustered race group (Asian/Am. Ind. or Nat. Am./Nat. Haw or Pac. Isl.) are excluded from the analysis for privacy reasons as fewer than 10 total foster students were in the clustered graduation cohorts. Graduation Rates (Overall and by Race/Ethnicity)

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